



# All hope is is a bright thing in a dull world



6 0 2

## Chapter 1 by Dylan Smith

XRDJ-23, whose friends just called him Xerdja, was on yet another dreary patrol, another 2 hours of listening to the relentless plink-plink-pinking of the rain on his helmet as he trudged through the streets, desperately pulling the fabric of his coat tighter and tighter to keep the warmth closer to his bones. He marched through the streets on his preprogrammed, almost ritualistic march through the city, through the streets made empty by curfew and the promise that someone like him would do something about it if you wandered outside. Xerdjia was not sure he could harm someone who just needed a walk in the evening, to be honest the kind of weather that typically enshrouded the city would be punishment enough.

It was dull weather, just piddling rain and darkness. At least the storms were exciting, watching the lightning crash against the spires above, the thunder reverberate in your bones a moment later. No. This was just rain. Cold, miserable, rain.

Then something else fell from the heavens. XRDJ-23 had never seen anything like it before, a small sphere of white light that cut through the clouds, impacting the earth just a few yards away. XRDJ-23 considered that it might be a bomb, or a weapon sent by The Enemy, but honestly the prospect of something new and exciting was more compelling than the somewhat remote prospect of being blown to bits.

XRDJ-23 ran to the small crater the thing had created, goodness, how fast had that thing been traveling to create a dent in the solid concrete nearly a foot deep? And how durable was it to have survived? He picked up the sphere, even through his fur-insulated gloves he could feel how warm it was. Even through the dark glass of his helmet shielding his eyes, he could see how bright it was.

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"Just inspecting now sir. There appears to be some kind of crater."

What was he doing? Why was he hesitating? Central needed the full report. This thing needed to be taken, analyzed, to make sure it wasn't some kind of weapon. It could still explode, or send out... mind-rays or something equally nefarious sounding. You never knew with The Enemy.

"Nothing to report." XRDJ-23 said, stuffing the orb in his pocket.

"What do you mean?" Central was incredulous. First a crater, then nothing to report???

"It appears to have been a meteor strike... There's a hole but there's nothing in it that appears to be a weapon. Crater appears to be only a foot deep, it would be ineffective against any of our defenses if it was a weapon."

Now he was LYING to Central?

"Very good XRDJ-23." They had believed him. Of course they had. Who in their right mind would LIE to Central?

"Continue on route, we'll make a note with Scientific Services to check the crater, just in case. Central out."

XRDJ-23 hurried along the rest of his route... He didn't know why, he still had another 2 hours and rushing didn't accomplish anything but making wearing him out and making his legs burn.

Even when he got home and laid in bed, his heart was still beating a furious fearful tattoo.

He had LIED to Central. They would find out, they always did.

XRDJ-23 stood from his bed, and pulled his illicit prized from the pocket of his work coat.

Somehow, the light... it soothed him. It felt... He didn't know what the word was. Strife-less?

And it was so warm. And his living quarters were cold. He took the orb with him to bed, holding it tightly in his achingly cold fingers, pressing it into his stomach, trying to absorb the warmth within it.

He drifted off to sleep, and for the first time he could recall, he dreamed.

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